

Epilepsy

Information Pack for students



Definition of a Disability

The Equality Act (2010) replaced the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) in providing protection and legal rights for disabled people. It uses the following definition of disability:

“The Act defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term (i.e. has lasted or is likely to last for at least twelve months) adverse effect on a person’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

More information on the Act can be found at http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/RightsAndObligations/DisabilityRights/DG_4001068

Epilepsy as a Disability

According To Epilepsy Action, epilepsy is currently defined as a tendency to have recurrent seizures. A seizure is caused by a sudden burst of electrical activity in the brain, which confuses the messages being passed between brain cells. How you experience a seizure will depend on where it occurs in the brain and how rapidly and extensively it spreads.

Sometimes what causes Epilepsy is clear, eg. a blow to the head or an infection. This is called **symptomatic** epilepsy. **Idiopathic** epilepsy is where the causes are unknown. **Cryptogenic** means that doctors believe there is likely to be a cause but they are unable to find it.

Seizures can be described by which part or parts of the brain the epileptic activity starts in. The three groups are: **partial** (also called focal), **secondary generalised**, and **generalised**.

- **Partial seizures** involve epileptic activity in just a part of the brain. Partial seizures can be divided into **simple partial** and **complex partial**.

In a **simple partial** seizure the person is fully conscious. They remain fully aware of their surroundings, despite seizure activity

In a **complex partial** seizure a person partly loses consciousness and they are not aware of what they are doing. Because of this, they may not remember the seizure afterwards, or their memory of it will be unclear.

- **Generalised seizures** involve epileptic activity in both halves of the brain. The person loses consciousness during the seizure.
- Sometimes, the epileptic activity that starts as a partial seizure can spread to the rest of the brain. When this happens, the seizure is known as **secondary generalised**.

Strategies for dealing with Epilepsy

Medical

Epilepsy is usually treated with anti epileptic drugs (AEDs), which act on the brain to reduce or stop seizures from happening.

When AEDs do not work well, other treatments can include brain surgery, vagus nerve stimulation and special diet.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

This can help with managing any emotional problems. It can provide valuable psychological support, helping to overcome a negative attitude and state of mind.

Counselling

It can be helpful talking to someone about any problems that you are experiencing in coping with your condition. Counselling can be accessed through the University's Student Counselling Service or via your GP.

Study Strategies

As a student at Oxford, you are likely to have a demanding workload and busy timetable. It is therefore extremely important that you prioritise your work, and let your tutors and college know about your condition.

Support options:

- Support worker. This is someone who assists you with study related needs, such as note taking, photocopying, and note transcription.
- Mentor: This is someone who can help you plan, prioritise, and help you manage your workload effectively; balancing your health needs with your academic study needs.
- Exams and course work: speak to your tutors about deadlines for essays. You should notify your college of the possibility that your exams could be affected in the event of a seizure. The college can then notify the Proctors in advance of the exam. Should a seizure occur, your college will liaise with the Proctors about the best way to proceed. They can also apply for extra time in exams if this is appropriate. Information about applying for special exam arrangements or course extensions can be found at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/exams/>

Financial Assistance

- Information about applying for funding can be found at: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/funding/>
- **Disability Living Allowance** is not related to study needs but can be accessed if you meet certain criteria. There is a care component and a mobility component to DLA. You need to apply for this through the Department for Work and Pensions. Contact details are below.

Useful Contacts

The Disability Advisory Service

Address: 3 Worcester Street, Oxford <http://tinyurl.com/DASphotoandmap>

Phone: 01865 2 80459

Website: <http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/shw/das/>

Oxford University Student Union (OUSU), 2 Worcester Street, Vice-President – Welfare, (Tel: 01864 (2) 88461, Email: welfare@ousu.org, Web: www.ousu.org/advice). OUSU has an active Disabilities Action Group, which works to raise awareness of disability issues in the University.

Oxford University Student Counselling Service

3 Worcester Street, Oxford

Tel No: (01865)270300

Email: reception@counserv.ox.ac.uk

web: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/shw/counserv.shtml>

Epilepsy Action: <http://www.epilepsy.org.uk/>

Epilepsy Society:

<http://www.epilepsysociety.org.uk/Homepage?gclid=CObOq72-1qkCFRQKfAodJU9EMw>

Oxford University press release:

http://www.ox.ac.uk/media/news_releases_for_journalists/080604_1.htm

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Dept for Work and Pensions (DLA)

Tel: 0800 88 22 00

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/FinancialSupport/DG_10011731

NHS online

<http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk>